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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000093

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SUBJECT: SERIOUS CONCERNS WITH NEWLY-APPOINTED BASRAH SECURITY COMMITTEE

REF: BAGHDAD 1869

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, DEPUTY REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO BASRAH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: It is unlikely that the 5-person emergency security committee appointed by PM Nouri Al Maliki will be able to positively impact on the security situation in Basrah. Three of its members, Badr Corps head Hadi al-Amiri, former Minister of Transportation Salam al-Maliki, and Minister of Provincial Affairs Dr. Safa al Saafi, have close ties to Basrah Governor Mohammed Wa'hili, who has been identified by numerous sources as one of the main reasons for Basrah's deplorable security situation. Security in Basrah continues to be a main concern, as a direct attack on the REO compound, a bomb in a marketplace, and an attack on a Sunni mosque all occurred within the past 24 hours (to be reported in septel). End Summary.

Emergency Committee Has No Plan, Wants to Leave Basrah

¶2. (C) The British Consul General reported that in a June 2 meeting, the emergency committee spent the initial few minutes of the meeting outlining a plan to establish 24-hour vehicle police checkpoints in order to arrest unmarked cars. This was the extent of their security plan. During the remainder of the meeting, the committee members, and Dr. Safa in particular, chastised the British representatives on detainee issues. After an hour on the subject of British military failures, the committee then requested British military transport back to Baghdad on Sunday.

¶3. (C) The British Consul General expressed concern that the emergency plan as outlined in the June 2 meeting was insufficiently developed to adequately address Basrah's numerous security concerns. He also expressed disbelief that this was the outcome that the PM had been hoping to achieve, and questioned the decision to put the governor in charge of security. He noted that Dr. Safa has come out strongly in support of the governor.

Emergency Committee Compromised

¶4. (C) In a June 4 meeting, Majed al-Sari, Ministry of Defense Advisor for the Southern Region, told the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) that the emergency security committee had no hope of stabilizing the situation in Basrah with the Governor at its head, comparing the situation to "a thief minding the store." He described Dr. Safa as a close personal friend of Governor Wa'hili. Former Transportation Minister Salam

al-Maliki used to be the Deputy Governor of Basrah in 2004, Majed said, and has too many personal interests in Basrah to be able to deal with the security crisis neutrally. Amiri, a well-known Badr Organization member, went to the same school as Governor Wa'hili and was also a close friend of his. Majed was unable to name the Sunni Arab representative on the committee, although he said he thought there was one. (Comment: We have heard three different names for the Sunni representative: Samara'ee (no further information), Amer (no further information), and Khalaf al-Issa, head of the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party and parliamentarian. We have been unable to confirm any of these names. End Comment.)

¶15. (C) When asked why he thought the PM had appointed these people to be on the committee, Majed answered that he believed it was out of desire to avoid bringing in "outsiders" who would be viewed with distrust by the provincial government. He said this was fine, but the mistake was in not balancing out the "insiders" with technocrats and other political independents. He noted that all of the members on the committee were political figures who would look at the Basrah problem through the perspective of their parties' interests, not in terms of how to solve the problem. He suggested that representatives from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Human Rights should have been included on the council. He expressed disbelief that the emergency committee included no representatives from the Iraqi Army or police.

¶16. (C) Comment: The issue of British-held detainees and forcing their release has been Governor Mohammed's favorite theme for months. That Dr. Safa took this issue on in the security committee meeting, even though it is not directly related to Basrah's security situation, concerns us. The committee appears to be more concerned with laying the blame for Basrah's poor security on coalition forces than actually doing anything to address the problem. Vehicle checkpoints alone will do little to improve matters in Basrah, especially if they are under the control of the Basrah police. Even this part of the plan has not been fully implemented yet in the city.

¶17. (C) Comment continued: We concur with the British and with Majed al Sari that the emergency security committee, as it now

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stands, will fail because the emergency plan is unworkable and inadequate, and because the security committee is not committed to finding solutions to the security crisis in Basrah. The Governor has been implicated repeatedly in militia-related attacks and assassinations, as well as oil smuggling and other corrupt activities. It is inconceivable that he will be able to positively impact Basrah's security. Central government involvement is crucial in order to remove the Governor from the head of the emergency committee; if he cannot be physically removed, his influence on the committee must be reduced. We also believe that making the emergency committee more representative by including non-political members of the Ministries of Defense and Human Rights, for example, would be a step in the right direction. End comment.
MARRANO